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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [KV](#) [UNMIK](#)
SUBJECT: KOSOVO: SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH MODERATES,
RECONSTRUCTION EFFORTS UNDER HEAVY ATTACK

Classified By: Chief of Mission Tina S. Kaidanow for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Kosovo's hardline church leader Bishop Artemije Radosavljevic has responded to independence by ordering his clergy to break off contact with any organization or person supporting independence, including the Kosovo government and foreign diplomats. He has also deemed invalid the Council of Europe-led Reconstruction Implementation Commission (RIC), which aims to rebuild 35 churches destroyed in the March 2004 riots, since it is largely financed by the Kosovo government. Nevertheless, moderate Serb Orthodox clergy, such as auxiliary Bishop Teodosije Sibalic and Father Sava Janjic of the Visoki Decani monastery, continue to want to pursue cooperative projects with international organizations and their Kosovo Albanian neighbors. Apart from Artemije's attempt to shut down the RIC -- the only organization in which Belgrade, Pristina and the Serb Orthodox Church cooperate -- its chairwoman has concerns about the viability of the project in light of Artemije's restrictions on church cooperation. Meanwhile, the Kosovo government has continued its efforts to protect the most vulnerable Serbian Orthodox sites from theft and vandalism, and remove inaccurate language about the most holy sites from its official websites. The Serbian Orthodox Synod -- the only body that can definitively settle the issue either way -- sent a delegation to Kosovo March 3-4, and largely avoided dealing with the difficult questions posed by the conflict within the church's ranks. This gives Artemije the advantage for now. END SUMMARY.

Gag Order

12. (C) In response to Kosovo's February 17 declaration of independence, hard-line Bishop Artemije Radosavljevic, who holds primacy over Serbian Orthodox clergy in Kosovo, issued instruction forbidding contact with the Kosovo government, the ICO/EULEX missions, and representatives from liaison offices or embassies of countries recognizing independence. According to Father Sava Janjic of Visoki Decani monastery in western Kosovo, the harsh communication restrictions imposed by Artemije's edict have already had detrimental effect. New Decani Mayor Musa Berisha was forced to cancel a visit to the

monastery on February 28; this would have been his first contact with Visoki Decani's abbot, the moderate Bishop Teodosije Sibalic. Sava asked USOP to inform the mayor of these restrictions, which he considers "absurd." (Note: We did so, and the mayor told us he understood the situation in which the Decani monks find themselves. End Note.) Sava also told us that he and Teodosije have been compelled to decline other visits since February 17; with deep regret and evident mortification, they turned down COM's offer for a meeting with Acting U/S Dan Fried during his impending March 7 visit to Kosovo.

Artemije's Assault on the RIC

13. (C) Threatened by hardline Kosovo Serb and Serbian forces throughout its existence, the future of the RIC, a highly successful Kosovo Serb-oriented initiative funded in large part by the Kosovo government, now appears to be in serious doubt. On February 29, Artemije appeared with Serbian Minister for Religion Radomir Naumov in Gracanica, declaring that the MOU governing the RIC was "no longer valid" after Kosovo's declaration of independence. Artemije also announced that he and Naumov had signed an agreement by which the Serbian government would fund church reconstruction, and called upon the international community to start negotiations aimed at producing a new consensus on church reconstruction, in which the church would play a more active role in project implementation. Artemije also called for the reinstatement of a lawsuit, filed in 2004, against NATO, claiming damages for churches damaged in the March 2004 riots. The suit was suspended by the Synod in 2005, according to Father Sava, at the insistence of Archbishop (and widely-reputed next Patriarch) Amfilohije.

Laboring On

14. (C) Despite the new restrictions on communication, Teodosije and Sava have continued their efforts to cooperate with the international community and Kosovo Albanians. According to Carmichael, Teodosije, the Serbian Orthodox Church's representative to the RIC, has decided to continue participation in the RIC process until or unless he is told otherwise. (Note: Teodosije said this on February 28, before Artemije's pronouncement on the subject. End Note) In addition, the monastery has pressed on with a cooperative irrigation project which would benefit an Albanian village near the Decani Monastery. Teodosije met recently with a group of Albanian village leaders about this project, and has secured financial support from the Norwegian Office in Pristina, along with logistical and construction support from KFOR and the Decani municipality. However, as an example of how constrained communication with most outsiders has become, on March 3, a USAID engineer coming to evaluate possible participation in the irrigation project was sent away with a note asking him to come at another time.

CoE Concerned

15. (C) Even though Artemije's attempt to shut it down was neither adopted nor commented upon by the church's governing Synod during its March 3-4 visit to Kosovo, (see paragraph 9), Carmichael told us February 29 that the RIC will face problems because Artemije's instructions make it impossible for the church to accept money from the Kosovo government, which funds nearly all RIC projects (see paragraph 8). (Note: This may also impact a USOP-Embassy Belgrade grant to reconstruct the iconostasis of the Church of St. Nicholas in Pristina; under Artemije's orders the church cannot accept money from the U.S. government. We are searching for a workable alternative. End Note.) Another problem will be new project tenders; the Serbian government is expected, at the very least, to suspend its participation in the RIC, making approval of new tenders impossible. Carmichael fears the RIC's plans for 2008 will be delayed at best and canceled at worst. Finally, she reported that a Kosovo Serb employee of the CoE's Pristina office had to spend several days convincing his neighbors in Lipljan that his continued employment was not a violation of the Serbian government's

call for Kosovo Serbs to withdraw from Kosovo institutions. He only managed to do this because the church has endorsed the RIC's mission.

¶16. (C) Carmichael also told us that the RIC was trying to determine what to do with 12 projects that are nearing completion. According to Sava, the elderly Artemije, whose public rhetoric has gotten more shrill in recent months, has privately called RIC-restored churches "Shiptar churches," using a highly derogatory Serbian word to describe Albanians.

Carmichael said it is hard to determine what the Raska-Prizren diocese, which Artemije heads, will do with these structures once the RIC is ready to hand them over after reconstruction is finished. Artemije also complained of the "low quality" of RIC reconstruction to PDSRSG Rossin on March 1. (Comment: Artemije's rhetoric may be too incendiary even for hardliners in Serbia's government and the Orthodox Church. ICO Cultural Heritage officer Andrea Battista told us February 29 that his contacts inside the church claim that the organizers of the February 21 demonstrations in Belgrade protesting Kosovo's independence - which featured nationalist rants from PM Kostunica and Radical Party leader Nikolic and ended with mob violence against the U.S. Embassy - prevented Artemije from addressing the crowd for fear that his inflammatory words would incite even more serious violence. End Comment.)

Kosovo Government Continues Support

¶17. (C) Whether Artemije chooses to acknowledge the RIC's work, the Kosovo government, which had funded the RIC with more than 3.5 million euros since 2005, continues its efforts to protect vulnerable church sites from vandalism and theft.

On February 29, the Technical Working Group of the Sub Working Group on Cultural Heritage finalized an operational order for the Kosovo Police Service (KPS) which enhances KPS efforts to protect Serbian Orthodox church sites. At the same meeting, the Technical Working Group received a report from UNMIK about interim security measures to guard some of the most vulnerable RIC sites, some of which have been burglarized more than once. UNMIK reported that KPS officers are guarding the sites on a 24-hour basis, and that a private security company, hired with 50,000 euro approved by the previous Kosovo government, has begun installation of sensors, cameras, and its own guard posts for longer-term protection of these sites.

¶18. (C) The Ministry of Culture, in coordination with USOP, ICO, and CoE, has also taken measures to correct problems with language it generated in 2005 describing major Serbian Orthodox sites, such as Decani Monastery and Pec Patriarchate, as "Byzantine-Illyrian" monuments, thus implicitly denying their Serbian heritage. The language found its way onto a website run by the Ministry of Trade and Industry's Department of Tourism in January 2007, causing a reaction in the Serbian press and unnerving Bishop Teodosije.

CoE has agreed to provide more accurate language, and Minister of Culture Skender Hyseni told COM on February 29 that he and his staff will be open to approving it for use. Synod Indecisive for Now

¶19. (C) The Serbian Orthodox Synod - the group of senior clerics which governs the church - sent a delegation of bishops to Kosovo on March 3-4. The group met at the Pec Patriarchate (in Peja/Pec municipality) on March 4 and then visited the Visoki Decani monastery and some RIC sites in Djakova/Djakovica and Prizren. Artemije did not attend the session: Father Sava informed us that Artemije claimed to have "other things to do." We alerted Peja/Pec mayor Ali Berisha of the meeting, along with KFOR and the KPS, and there were no security incidents during this visit. According to readouts of the group's visit to the RIC sites, the bishops were impressed with the quality of the reconstructed churches.

¶10. (C) Sava and Teodosije had hoped that the Synod bishops, led by Metropolitan Amfilohije Radovic, would discuss

Artemije's communications restrictions and his statements about the RIC, but instead the group avoided any comment on these. Sava told us he had planted a question with a Serb radio reporter to be directed at Amfilohije about Artemije's order, but that Amfilohije gave a vague answer, indicating that there would be no problem with clergy "contacting internationals who have been here for a longer time and who have contributed to the protection of churches and monasteries." Sava and Teodosije are therefore "deeply distressed," in Sava's words, that Artemije's order apparently still stands. On March 4, Sava described the situation inside the Synod as "blocked," with the nationalist forces around Artemije having the upper hand due to their close allegiance with PM Kostunica's government. Sava assured us he would keep contact with us via e-mail, but will establish an "alias" e-mail address for more sensitive messages.

¶11. (C) Even this vague, noncommittal statement from Amfilohije drew more bilious rhetoric from Artemije, who, on March 5, denounced Amfilohije's words as an "...impermissible and uncanonical interference in the affairs of another diocese." He went to say that Amfilohije's stance was contrary not only to his own, but to the positions of the Serbian government and Parliament, and then attacked Amfilohije in a more personal way: "If he (Amfilohije) is the deputy of the Patriarch he is not the deputy of the other bishops," adding that "surely no one (among Kosovo's clergy) will obey him." Artemije also explicitly attacked the visit to Prizren, which claimed took place without his agreement as the top spiritual authority in Kosovo; this was "another violation of the canon, which he (Amfilohije) consciously committed."

COMMENT

¶12. (C) Bishop Artemije's pressure upon his clergy to reject Kosovo's independence mirrors the Serbian government's pressure on all Serbs to do the same. While Serbs of all political persuasions oppose independence, it is dismaying that the few moderates who are trying to remain constructive also feel constrained by his rhetoric, at least for now. Artemije's direct attack upon Amfilohije indicates either a touch of madness or supreme confidence that he has more support for his hardline positions in the church. The lack of a definitive statement from Amfilohije, despite Artemije's attack against what little he did say, constitutes an effective endorsement of Artemije's recent pronouncements. The survival of the RIC - the only organization in which Belgrade, Pristina, and the Serb Orthodox Church participate - is now very much in doubt. Besides his direct attack upon the RIC itself, Artemije's new arrangement between the church and the Serbian government is another sign that any cooperative church reconstruction project has little chance of succeeding at the moment. If the Synod, which retains the authority to decide such matters, does not end up deciding to discontinue participation in the RIC, we will work with the CoE and Bishop Teodosije to try to continue this important undertaking. For its part, the Government of Kosovo has taken many of the right steps to protect church sites; we will maintain dialogue with the central and local government officials to ensure that this continues. At the moment, however, Artemije and his allies appear to hold the advantage. END COMMENT.
KAIDANOW